

# Restricting participation

## Unaccompanied children in interpreter-mediated asylum hearings in Sweden

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To Henrich, Boris and Mark



## Abstract

The overall goal of this thesis was to highlight different communicative aspects of participation in interpreter-mediated asylum hearings with unaccompanied Russian-speaking children who had applied for asylum in Sweden between 2001 and 2005. Participation in the asylum process is guaranteed to these children by the Swedish Administrative Law and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), which are incorporated in the Swedish Aliens Act. The Migration authorities in their work with asylum seeking minors have integrated principles of the best interests of the child and the principle of respecting the children's views on matters concerning them

In this thesis, we have studied the conditions of participation in a highly complex, hybrid activity type, where participants face contradictory demands. Hybridity can be traced in communicative dilemmas which are difficult to solve and handle for all the participants involved, including the caseworkers, interpreters and children. The caseworkers are expected to control an interview in which whole of the communicative exchange is rendered by interpreters who influence the progress of the encounter. Contradiction lies in the fact that the caseworkers are expected to treat all asylum seekers equally both as a group and individually, by relating to general legal regulations and at the same time, take into account the interests and individual needs of an individual child. It might be difficult for these caseworkers to stay neutral and meet underage clients whose life stories and experiences, conduct and needs differ considerably from what is usually ascribed to children.

Asylum seeking children come to Sweden to stay. Our results have shown that they take an active role in their attempts to lead to a positive outcome in their cases. In this respect, children's testimonies and the impression they make as informants play a salient role. The communicative tasks faced by the adolescents are, however, difficult to achieve. Previous life conditions, vulnerability, psychosomatic problems, and memory and concentration difficulties may affect their performance. Other factors

which might further impede these children from achieving their task is the pragmatic and linguistic deficiency, which they experience in a context where they lack communicative means and are not fully aware of the norms and regulations relevant for the encounter. Despite these limitations, it seems that these minors try hard to shoulder their role as asylum seekers and informants actively and strategically. One strategy chosen by the children was to disclose information selectively. They tried to avoid answering questions which could reveal their age, origin or the whereabouts of their caregivers and thereby enable authorities to establish their identity and send them back. To compensate for their uncooperativeness in this area, the adolescents tended to provide information which had not been asked for.

Our studies have shown that children could have been prevented by both the caseworkers and interpreters from expressing their views and opinions in a free and self-chosen way. In this respect, interpreters' contributions were salient for what information was forwarded to the caseworkers. In some cases, they changed both the language and the format of the responses provided by the children. Some of the communicative strategies which were initiated by the interpreters could be linked to both their professional skills and to the hybridity and the complexity of the situation. Interpreters had difficulties staying neutral in relation to the children and orient them in the encounters. Age differences between the participants could also have an impact on how the children were treated and the respect and importance attributed to their voices. We have identified sequences where interpreters initiated monolingual exchanges with one of the interlocutors where they actively tried to exclude and discredit the children's voices, something which often happened with the tacit approval of the caseworkers.

Thus, it can be seen that communicative premises which are inherent in the asylum hearings influence the participant statuses of the children and their possibilities to express their asylum claims.

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## I List of papers

This thesis is based on the following papers, referred to in the text as Studies 1, 2, 3, and 4.

1. Keselman, O., Cederborg, A-C., Lamb, M. E., & Dahlström, Ö. (2008). Mediated Communication with Minors in Asylum seeking hearings. *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 21:1, 103-116.
2. Keselman, O., Cederborg, A-C., Lamb, M. E., & Dahlström, Ö. (in press). Asylum seeking minors in interpreter-mediated interviews: what do they say and what happens to their responses? *Child & Family Social Work*.
3. Keselman, O., Cederborg, A-C., & Linell, P. (in press). That is not necessary for you to know! - Negotiation of the participant status of minors in interpreter-mediated asylum hearing. *International Journal of Research and Practice in Interpreting*.
4. Linell, P., & Keselman, O. *Trustworthiness at stake: Trust and distrust in investigative interviews with Russian adolescent asylum-seekers in Sweden*. Paper prepared for I. Marková & A. Gillespie. (eds.), *Trust and Conflict: Representation, culture and dialogue*. Submitted to series *Cultural dynamics of social representations*. Series editor: J. Valsiner (Routledge).

## II Aims of this study

The overall aim of this thesis is to explore how the participation of asylum-seeking children is interactively constructed in interpreter-mediated asylum hearings. This scientific undertaking can be further specified in terms of four subgoals.

The first goal is to explore the ways in which unaccompanied asylum-seeking children are interviewed, and how the information-seeking prompts used by the caseworker are rendered by the interpreters.

A second, related, goal is to explore how these children account for their experiences and perspectives and how they respond to information-seeking prompts and to what degree the content of their responses will remain unchanged or altered in the renditions provided by the interpreter.

A third goal is to explore how the participant status of the unaccompanied asylum-seeking children can be challenged by the interpreters.

A fourth and more general goal is to explore the asylum interview as a communicative activity type and study the impact that the underlying agendas might have on the communicative behaviour of the interlocutors, especially as regards mutual trust and distrust between them.

In order to more fully understand various aspects of participation, I will also analyse some background factors, including health-related aspects of children's functioning, objectives relevant to participation in this complex environment and the legislative, regulatory framework of the asylum procedure in Sweden.

## III Background

### 3.1 Unaccompanied Russian-speaking children seeking asylum in Sweden: Tales and realities

To move around is a *condition humaine* (Blommaert & Verschueren, 1998). Further, a lot of people might choose flight as the only way to start a new life, free from the harm and injustice inflicted on them and their human rights in their country of origin. Many flee in the belief that the experience of migration, no matter how hard it might be, can possibly outweigh the hazards of the situation they have to

endure at home (O'Connell Davidson & Farrow, 2007). Driven by such an understanding, those contemplating flight, both adults and children, might choose to look for any kind of information that presents migration as a principally positive experience. The following description of the immigration procedure that is available on a Russian Internet site, and which is cited below as an example, provides information presented in such a way as to confirm and reinforce positive expectations.

*In each of the [host] countries there is a special program for receiving so called asylum seeking minors who arrive in the country unaccompanied by their parents. They are placed in orphanages with a good standard of living, good catering, and where the government has taken upon itself full responsibility for the care of the child [...] All child claimants still need to tell a little story about the whos and whats, the whys and wherefores, but the whole process is much simpler than in talks with adult asylum seekers [...] As a rule, all of these [children] are granted permanent residence permits and subsequently, citizenship...*

(translated excerpt from Russian-language site "Asylum-seeking for minors" - <http://www.alpary.net/imigr-7.html>)

Texts, advertising the educational and work possibilities, access to dental and health care, and sport facilities in Sweden, as well as daily allowances (usually given in US dollars) are apparently attractive. They might serve to create an illusion of a smooth and easy migration process, in which children are primarily treated as passive receivers of welfare care and protection. An asylum hearing, conducted in the presence of a guardian and a legal representative, is mentioned in these texts as a formal requirement of a child-friendly refugee policy that usually alludes to the 1951 UN Convention. A potential child asylum-seeker might thus be led to believe that the very fact of being in the territory of a receiving country without the company of parents or caregivers, might constitute an argument substantial enough for a residence permit. These texts may be interpreted as if the acquisition of a residence permit for unaccompanied children is almost a formality, while the considerations behind the selection procedure for those who are allowed to stay are not explicitly stated. This lack of clarity from advertisers might be intentional and in the self-interest of those agencies which make money from providing additional, more detailed information as well as

coaching on asylum issues on individual request. Such “expert“ help is not affordable for the majority of children who choose or are forced to flee without sufficient insights into the host country or asylum determination procedure. For some of these children, books, movies and cartoons might serve as a primary source of knowledge about the country they are heading to, as exemplified below in an excerpt taken from the data in this thesis:

*Caseworker: What did you think Sweden would be like before you came here?*

*Asylum-seeking adolescent: ...I didn't know anything about the Migration Board... and about Sweden... I saw a cartoon, "Karlsson-on-the-roof", I think a Swedish author wrote it... I thought it was a fairy-tale land... not a real country but a fairy-tale... It is beautiful here, very clean... not like in Russia but still, a little bit like Russia anyway...*

(Excerpt from asylum hearing [case16] with Peter, aged 17).

This naive pre-flight image of a receiving country might seem to be misplaced, and more appropriate for a little child than for an adolescent. Such images might however be widespread, and shared by asylum seekers (both adults and children) originating from former communist countries. Citizens of the former communist regimes, including the Soviet Union, have been found to comply easily with the false publicity and propaganda of traffickers, angled media stories and images, as well as exaggerated reports of the success of those who have already migrated. This particular receptiveness is explained by long-termed experiences of information deficiency and political isolation, as well as the non-existence of free media (Ghosh, 2000:12). In the end, the true value of rumours and promises about migration is discovered by every single claimant individually as part and parcel of the real-life immigration process.

Sweden's experience of hosting refugees dates back to the late 1920s when a first considerable refugee flow, consisting of people fleeing from the post-revolutionary persecution and terror in Russia, started to arrive in the country (Dahlström, 2004). This trend continued in the wake of the World War II, and in the late 1940s, 1950s and 1960s, adult and child refugees and their next of kin constituted one of the dominant groups of foreigners hosted by Sweden (Westin & Dingu-Kyrklund, 2003).

Although unaccompanied children were not an official category at the time of the war, they have been mentioned in refugee discourses in the late 1930s when rescue actions involving children took place in Sweden. This was the case when the massive evacuation of 70 000 Finnish children to Sweden during the Continuation and Winter Wars (1939-1944) was carried out, or when a small scale transport with 650 German - Jewish children was allowed to come to Sweden in 1939 (Swedish Intergration Board, 2003). As a result of international agreements signed by Sweden, a small number of unaccompanied child survivors from Nazi concentration camps was also admitted after the end of the War (Fried, 1998).

At the end of the 1980s, the category of separated/unaccompanied children was “rediscovered“ in Sweden as this group of asylum seekers became increasingly visible in the reception system and in the statistics of the Swedish Immigration Board. All children registered under this category are under the age of eighteen and are separated from primary caregivers at the time when the asylum application is submitted (Swedish National Audit Office, 2002).

The analysis of the profiles and backgrounds of child claimants made by the Swedish migration authorities has shown similarities between this group and adult refugees and asylum seekers applying for residence permits in Sweden. Individuals coming from the same countries disclose similar incentives for flight, which are closely linked to the situation in the country of origin, such as war, political unrest and economic instability (Swedish National Board of Health and Welfare, 2002). In addition, child claimants reveal circumstances which are related to child-specific forms of persecution, such as homelessness, deprivation and different forms of abuse (Juhlén, 2003).

Since the late 1990s, unaccompanied asylum-seeking children, originating in the former republics of the Soviet Union, started to arrive in West European countries, including Sweden. Most of these child claimants are adolescents, predominantly boys. The majority of them claim to be street children (homeless or runaways from orphanages, children’s homes or boarding schools), orphans, or “social orphans” (i.e. their parents may still be alive but have been deprived of their parental rights). Due to their vulnerability, street children become easy targets for the criminal networks that recruit minors for prostitution and other criminal activities, such as

dealing with narcotics, theft, begging and burglary, both at home and abroad (Stephenson, 2002; Aref'ev, 2005). Criminal networks have often been identified as initiators, providers and organizers of children's escape to Sweden (Swedish Integration Board, 2003).

Other groups of Russian-speaking unaccompanied children smuggled to Sweden, have been driven to flight by incentives that can be traced to the socio-political changes brought about by the collapse of the Soviet Union. These children may belong to a minority ethnic or religious population and/or political opposition movement in their newly independent home countries (Brendler-Lindquist, 2004).

Common to all these adolescents seeking asylum in Sweden is that, as a result of the pre-flight and post-flight experiences, they have been exposed to trauma and multiple losses, including the loss of significant relationships and the loss of a familiar cultural and language environment (Rousseau et al., 2003; Sourander, 1998; Goodman, 2004). As a consequence, they become subjected to the concerns of the host-country's health care specialists, who define these children as potential candidates for developing psychiatric morbidity, dysfunctional behaviour patterns (such as suicide, drug and alcohol abuse, or delinquency), or impaired performance in relationships, school, work and play (Ahearn & Athey, 1991). They are also assumed to be in the risk zone for developing post - traumatic stress disorder, a condition that might be further complicated by the sequence of losses that go hand in hand with living in the streets, being on the run or being in a refugee situation (Ajdukovic & Ajdukovic, 1993; Derluyn & Broekaert, 2008). Besides, children (mostly originating from former Soviet republics of central Asia) are found to run a special risk of developing a loss of both physical and mental functions. Pervasive refusal syndrome (PRS), found to be a Swedish phenomenon, is manifested in total passivity, immobility, muteness, inability to eat and drink, lack of sensitivity to physical stimuli and pain, is the most severe, life-threatening form of this condition (Bodegård, 2005). This syndrome, distinguished by the absence of underlying physical disorders, is developed by asylum-seeking children during different stages of the asylum seeking process. It decreases after the residence permit has been granted (especially if the child receives treatment). This circumstance makes the whole issue of this syndrome a highly politicized and controversial matter and gives rise to many speculations. There is no doubt, however, that the specific

conditions of the Swedish asylum process might be highly taxing and profoundly handicapping for children. This is true of those who share the burden and stress of the refugee situation with their parents, but is even more pronounced for unaccompanied asylum seeking children (Asher, 2009).

### 3.2 The legal framework in Sweden and unaccompanied children

International and national legal standards and asylum policies and practices used for the reception and status determination of asylum seekers and refugees have evolved significantly since the 1950s when the Refugee Convention was first ratified. A number of legal reforms in the field of immigration emerged to address challenges brought about by new types of large scale conflicts, environmental changes, political and economic transformations and instability (Engebrigtsen, 2003). The fall of the Iron Curtain and the resulting increased mobility of the global population marked the beginning of a new era distinguished by considerable changes in political and public attitudes towards refugees and asylum seekers in the host countries (Appelquist, 1999). In Europe, the strain on the asylum systems of individual countries has led to the raising of immigration issues to a supranational level, to be tackled by cooperative and synchronized efforts on the part of all the member states of the European Union, including Sweden (Olsson, 2008). Overall, the Swedish Government has taken steps towards a gradual adjustment of the national refugee legislation in alignment with guidelines and practices set up by Treaties and Regulations of the European Union (Norström, 2004).

Since the post-war period, Swedish refugee policy has been guided by the principles outlined in the 1951 Convention and the 1967 Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees. The 1979 UNHCR Handbook on Procedures and Criteria for Determining Refugee Status was used to define and shape asylum procedural rules for migration authorities in Sweden as well as worldwide (UNHCR, 1979; Norström, 2004). In order to address issues posed by an increased migration of children, Sweden relied on UN policy documents such as the “Refugee children: Guidelines on Protection and Care“ from 1994, “Guidelines on Policies and Procedures in dealing with Unaccompanied Children Seeking Asylum” from 1997 and the UNHCR “Agenda for Protection“ from 2002 (Ruxton, 2003). Additional guidelines from the 1989 Convention on the Rights of

the Child (CRC) and its Optional protocols from 2002 referring to the protection and rights of the refugee children were also adopted by the Swedish legislation. Three provisions of the Convention, including: Article 2 (the “non-discrimination” clause), Article 3 (“best interests of the child”) and Article 12 (“the right of the child to be heard”) have gained special importance in the asylum context, when unaccompanied asylum-seeking children are involved (Juhlén, 2003).

The Swedish Aliens Act (SFS 2005:716) states that “[I]n cases concerning children, special consideration is to be given to what is required from the point of view of the child’s health and development, and with regard to the best interests of the child“ (Chapter 1, § 10). The best interests of the child are however subsidiary to Swedish society’s need for regulated migration. As a government bill explicitly states, the assessment of best interests “can not be given such a scope that the simple fact of being a child is almost a criterion in its own right for awarding a residence permit” (Government Bill 1996/97:25). Thus, in practice, the principle of the best interests of the child operates mostly as an interpretive aid, broadening and deepening the extent of protection, both in terms of substantive law and procedural mechanisms (Bhabha & Young, 1999:98).

In the end, it is the Swedish national refugee legislation and praxis outlined in the Swedish Aliens Act, governmental appropriation directions to the Migration Board (MB), as well as MB internal directives that have an overarching significance for how asylum seeking children are received and treated by the Law. Unaccompanied asylum seeking children admitted to the asylum determination procedure have to qualify themselves for a residence permit in accordance with categories defined by the Swedish Aliens Act. This means that after an assessment of their maturity status, the child, like any other applicant, must establish that he or she meets the definition of refugee or a person otherwise in need of protection as codified by the Swedish Law (Juhlén, 2003).

In 2006 a new Aliens Act (SFS 2005:716) came into force in Sweden. Before 2006 when the data for this thesis was collected, a child claimant might have been granted a residence permit on the following grounds: if judged to be a refugee or otherwise in need of protection (Ch 3, sec 2-3 SFS 1989:529), on humanitarian grounds (Ch 2, sec 4 (1), § 5, SFS 1989:529), or if he/she has a family in Sweden or some other

special connection with the Swedish State (Ch 2, sec 4(1), § 1- 4, SFS 1989:529). An analysis of the decisions has shown that unaccompanied asylum seeking children seldom qualify for refugee status and are commonly granted protection on humanitarian grounds or due to “particularly distressing circumstances”, a provision added to the new Aliens Act in 2005 (Swedish National Audit Office, 2002; Abraha, 2008). This new definition came to replace former humanitarian grounds definitions which the government considered to be imprecise and in need of re-evaluation. By defining circumstances as particularly distressing, the government wanted to clarify that this provision was of exceptional character intended to be used in situations not embraced by any other major grounds defined by the law for awarding a residence permit (Olsson, 2008). Particularly distressing circumstances may refer to the health-status of the individual who might be judged to be in need of protection due to severe illness or psychological ill-being, as well as due to a particularly severe disability. In cases of children with disabilities and impaired health, further considerations should be given to the prognosis, potential health-care needs and impact that a residence permit in Sweden or repatriation might have on the psychosocial development of the child. The economic costs that the treatment of a severely sick child might inflict on Sweden are supposed to be given weighting in as well (Government Bill prop. 2004/05:170).

Another circumstance to be assessed (stated in both the New and Previous Aliens Act) refers to an alien’s adjustment to Sweden, linked to the length of time spent by the applicant in the country. In the case of children, connection/adjustment to Sweden is to be thoroughly assessed by the decision-maker. Connection to the Swedish society, indicated by evidence that the child has become culturally and linguistically rooted in Sweden, might be given special consideration. As stated in the Government bill from 1996/97, it is not self-evident that children are “almost implicitly deemed to be best off in Sweden, whatever their linguistic, cultural and national identity might be” (Government Bill 1996/97:25). Adjustment to Sweden alone can not constitute sufficient grounds for granting a child residence permit (Olsson, 2008).

In addition, the most common reason for granting a residence permit to child applicants is the inability to locate and contact primary caregivers (family members) or otherwise find an authority which might take over their duties and responsibilities (Halvorsen, 2004). It is generally considered to be against humanitarian

concerns to send the child back to a country where no adequate reception is assured. This provision refers to children who are not about to reach the age of majority (Swedish National Audit Office, 2002).

In the beginning of the 2000s, unaccompanied child claimants had two options available in the case when their asylum application was declined. They could either comply with the decision and leave Sweden for their home country or another country that was willing to accept them, or they could lodge an appeal with the Aliens' Appeals Board. The Aliens' Appeals Board (Utlänningsnämnden) was an independent authority, consisting of judges, lay assessors and legally trained caseworkers. In exceptional cases, appeals might have been forwarded either by the Migration Board or by the Appeals Board to the government for review, in cases when state security issues or relations to other countries were drawn in (Halvorsen, 2004). This system was replaced in 2006 when a new Aliens Act was introduced. That means that from now on, decisions taken by the Swedish Migration Board can be appealed to three Country Administrative Courts (Migration Courts) and further to the Migration Court of Appeal in Stockholm. In the Migration Court, the Migration Board appears as an asylum seeker's counter-party and some of the Swedish Migration Board's case officers are litigation officers at the court proceedings. The cases decided by the Migration Court of Appeal will form precedents, i.e they will govern practice in aliens and citizenship cases (Swedish Government Offices, 2006; Abraha, 2008).

### 3.3 Asylum hearings in Sweden

When the child applicants are found mature enough to verbalize fear of persecution, they are summoned to the asylum interview to be heard. This is the right and an obligation provided to unaccompanied asylum seeking children by the Administrative Law and the Aliens Law (Olsson, 2008). Due to regulations of the Swedish legislation, children under the age of eighteen are treated as legally incompetent and it is the task of the guardian and the legal representative, specially appointed to the child, to safeguard his/her interests during the interview (Juhlén, 2003).

In the absence of written evidence, the oral testimony of the child, just as in cases of adult asylum seekers, is considered to be of principal importance for case assessment and adjudication (Gorlic, 2002). It is the caseworker who is charged with the major responsibility of facilitating the child's participation in the asylum hearing.

He/she is expected to provide the child with the opportunity to freely recall events and situations that might count as asylum claims eventually qualifying/disqualifying the child for a residence permit, on the grounds defined by the Law. The caseworker has to further control the interview situation by listening, keeping the child on track and asking for additional information or clarification of issues that seem to be unclear, incredible or inconsistent. The task assigned to the hearing, is considered to have been successfully accomplished when all the important facts relevant for the assessment of the case have been both elicited and verified (Government Bill prop. 2004/05:170).

It is not, however, enough just to hear the child and elicit his/her views. The caseworker is also expected to take into consideration the information provided by the child and make explicit reference to it in the Case Evaluation and Decision Explication. This is part of the practical implementation of CRC principles, adopted as guiding principles for the Swedish authorities working with children, with which caseworkers are tasked (Swedish Migration Board, 2001; Juhlén, 2003; Rimsten, 2005). Such explication is deemed necessary, partly out of respect for the child's views and partly as a measure for increasing understanding about how the decision is reached (Swedish Child Ombudsman, 2000).

Sweden has a reputation of being a country where human rights principles and the principles of the CRC are liberally applied (McAdam, 2006:260). There is, however, considerable dissatisfaction expressed by the government, migration authorities and practitioners concerning the practical implementation of Article 3 (the best interests of the child) and Article 12 (the right of the child to be heard and participate in dealings concerning them) (Government Bill prop 2004/05:170; Swedish Government Audit Office, 2002; Brendler-Lindquist, 2005). Considerable shortcomings are reported on each level of participation. This includes the ways in which the children are being questioned, the setting of the hearings, the skills of the interviewers, the support the children receive to express their views and the ways their views and best interests are taken into account and referred to in the decision-making process (Government bill 1996; Schiratzki, 2000; Juhlén, 2003a; Rimsten, 2005; Olsson, 2008). Possible explanations to the shortcomings are found in the legal ambiguity inherent in the open concept of participation, its legal status, the tension between the Article 12 and other principles of the Convention, as well as in the lack of genuine commitment on the

part of authorities to apply this notion in practice (Schiratzki, 2000; Nykänen, 2001; Nilsson, 2007).

Up till now, attempts made to improve this situation have mainly focused on the caseworkers, their adherence to the goals and principles of the CRC, their interviewing skills, expertise in child-specific developmental issues and to their sensitivity to cultural aspects. However, many of these measures have proven to be inefficient (Olsson, 2008; Lidén & Rusten, 2007).

One of the main reasons why these measures do not work may be the fact that the officially declared goals and models of participation should be primarily seen as general idealizations, and more consideration should be given to how these institutional practices are unfolded in situ (Peräkylä & Vehviläinen, 2003; Jingree & Finlay, 2008). Another reason is the cross-cultural and bilingual character of the encounter. The responsibilities and tasks of the caseworkers are partly appropriated by an interpreter who, for example, might not be committed to or trained in CRC concepts of children's participation and empowerment, in the same way as caseworkers.

Besides, participation rights might be conceived as both ideologically mandated and discursively produced. Both ideological considerations and conversational strategies employed by adult practitioners affect the participation status and empowerment of their clients and the ways their views and opinions are elicited and considered (Jingree & Finlay, 2008).

### 3.4 Previous studies of asylum hearings

Previous studies of asylum hearings in Switzerland (Kälin, 1986; Monnier, 1995), Canada (Barsky, 1993; 1994; Rousseau et al., 2002; 2003), the USA (Anker, 1992; Inghilleri, 2003), Netherlands (Doornbos, 2005), Belgium (Blommaert, 2001; Maryns, 2005), Austria (Pöllabauer, 2006; 2007), Great Britain (Crawley, 2006; Bohmer & Shuman, 2007), and Sweden (Diesen et al, 1998; Appelquist, 1999; Norström, 2004) have described the specific nature of this kind of institutional encounter. They have shown that despite a number of local variations in the settings, procedural regulations and artefacts, there are considerable similarities in how the context and the primary goals and role expectations inherent in the asylum hearing situation are understood. However, few of these studies have had specific focus on unaccompanied asylum-seeking children.

The settings where asylum hearings take place vary in formality between Refugee Courts, interrogations with the police or interviews with a civil authority. The type of setting has consequences for the content, format, and duration of interaction (Kälin, 1986; Barsky, 1994; Maryns, 2004; Rousseau et al., 2002; Crawley, 2006). Irrespective of the organizational specificities, the context in which an asylum hearing takes place has been described as highly complex and asymmetrical, distinguished by the differences in status, competence and responsibilities of its participants. In turn, this asymmetry of power entails consequences for the applicants' production of the testimony and control over the evaluation of their claims. Asylum-seekers fell short when they tried to fit their narrations into the unbending frames of the highly standardized question-answer structure of the interview. In addition, an inability on the part of the interlocutors to comprehend the cultural relativity of words, notions and concepts, further impeded the process of communication, and jeopardized the credibility of the applicants from Third World countries (Blommaert, 2001; Maryns, 2005; Kälin, 1986; Monnier, 1995; Pöllabauer, 2006; 2007; Bohmer & Shuman, 2007).

The attitudes and presumptive ideas about the incentives of asylum seekers influenced the ways in which the interviews were conducted and the questions that were posed. The criminalization of the asylum seekers and distrust on the part of the authorities has been identified as significant dimensions in the hearing (Kälin, 1986; Anker, 1992, Bohmer & Shuman, 2007, Doornoo, 2005). In the end, the procedure appeared to be not so much about determining refugee status, as it was a matter of assessing the veracity of the claim and ascertaining whether or not the applicant and his claims were deceptive (Maryns, 2005).

Interpreters have been unanimously recognized as indispensable actors in asylum hearings. The complexity of the setting and its multiple agendas and goals has consequences for how interpreters performed their tasks. Interpreters in asylum settings have been found to engage in a number of activities, ranging from providing culturally specific explanations, open intervening, spying and allying with one of the primary parties (Kälin, 1986; Barsky, 1993; 1994; Pöllabauer, 2006;2007; Bohmer & Shuman, 2007; Anker, 1992; Doornoo, 2005). As professionals, interpreters vary greatly in their ability to provide accurate renditions and comply with the institutional requirements of formality, consistency and coherence (Maryns, 2005).

The input of experienced interpreters well socialized in the institutional requirements was shown to be to the advantage of the applicant, for example, when an inconsistent or less skilfully produced narration is transformed into a consistent version in translation. As expected, the reverse condition held when inexperienced interpreters corrected or attempted to “improve” the testimony by, for instance, judging the relevance and the usefulness of statements, and abbreviating, paraphrasing and filtering the applicant’s narration (Kälin, 1986; Barsky, 1993; 1994; Pöllabauer, 2006; 2007; Anker, 1992; Maryns, 2005; Doornoos, 2005).

In most of the studies mentioned above, the environment of the asylum hearings was found to produce situations inconsistent with its stated legal purposes which are to evaluate evidence, assess credibility and conduct hearings. Officials encountered difficulties in fulfilling the objectives they claimed to pursue. The problems experienced by decision-makers were related to attempts at coping with vicarious traumatization and uncontrolled emotional reactions, poor knowledge of relevant political contexts, and cultural diversity issues in general (Rousseau et al., 2002; 2003; Barsky, 1993). However, again, few of these studies dealt specifically with asylum-seeking children. To my knowledge, no study has previously focused on unaccompanied Russian-speaking child applicants. This is why this study fills a gap in the research literature.

## IV This thesis

### 4.1 Theoretical background

#### *4.1.1 Communication as social interaction*

Drawing on the language philosophy of Bakhtin (1979; 1986), an important distinction can be made between a monological and dialogical view of communication and language. Monologism and dialogism are seen as opposite and complementary perspectives used for the study of language as social interaction. Monologism is still quite dominant in the everyday understanding of language and implies, among other things, that words and expressions are understood as having fixed meanings that can also be used metaphorically. In the framework of a monological

approach, the decision to use certain words is made by the speaker alone, and this defines the meaning of what is said (Wadensjö & Bot, 2004).

In contrast, according to a dialogical view of language and communication, people engaged in talk are involved in a form of situated intercourse where each contribution is interactionally constituted (Duranti, 1997). The contents of what is uttered and the form in which the content is circulated, can not be separated from the participants' interaction and the relationships in which they are engaged. Meanings and messages uttered in talk are co-constructed by actively involved interlocutors as they change their alignments and positions as speakers and listeners (Linell, 1998; Marková et al, 2007). A monological model of language treats interpreting as analogous to written translation: a transfer of messages from one linguistic system to another, focusing on establishing correspondence between orally produced "source texts" and "target texts". This approach can be used to explore a narrower talk-as-text paradigm, and can be contrasted with the dialogical model of language which treats interpreting as interaction between participants as a social event. A dialogical or interactionist approach to interpreting allows the exploration of various communicative activities, their nature and their mutual interdependence in social interaction (Wadensjö, 1998).

#### *4.1.2 Participation framework*

Since participation is a key concept in this thesis, it may be relevant to look at the work of some authors who have contributed to the development of different aspects of participation.

A wider notion of participation can be drawn from a variety of disciplines. The concept has been used as an important tool for empirical investigations into how the different roles assumed by interlocutors, are constituted through interaction and how social identities are discursively created and reproduced (Duranti, 1997).

One of the major analytical instruments that have been applied in studies of interaction was presented by Goffman (1981) who introduced the notion of the participation framework. According to Goffman, a person's participation status should be analysed in terms of how she relates on the one hand as hearer and, on the other, as speaker of a particular utterance or discourse. Interlocutors negotiate participation statuses, thus altering alignment in interaction. In order to discriminate between the

different senses in which the term “speaker“ is used, Goffman suggests three notions: animator, author and principal. The animator is defined as “the sounding box from which utterances come”; the author as “the agent who puts together, composes, or scripts the lines that are uttered”, and the principal as “the party to whose position, stand and belief the words attest“ (Goffman, 1981:226). These three definitions together comprise the production format of the utterance and delineate the individual’s relation to a particular utterance or text.

Different production roles are attributed to the speaker in order to make explicit to what extent he or she can be accountable for what he or she utters and in what way the utterance conveys the speaker’s own intentions or the ideas of others. On the reception side, everyone who has access to the ongoing talk becomes a recipient of this talk either as a “ratified participant” (as addressee or non-addressee) or “unratified participant” (bystander, overhearer or eavesdropper).

In multi-party talk, participants might get involved in subordinate communication, that is, talk that does not belong to the main focused interaction (encounter). Goffman (1981:133) distinguishes between three kinds of subordinate communication: byplay (subordinate communication between ratified participants), crossplay (interaction between bystanders and ratified participant) and sideplay (communication between bystanders).

The participation framework is under continuous negotiation, and so is an individual’s participation status, which is partly influenced by his/her own choice, partly by how people co-present relate to him/her and to others present (Wadensjö, 1992; Cederborg, 1994). Since participation is viewed by Goffman as a joint social activity, utterances produced by one individual in any given moment of social interaction, might be seen as a product of the shared efforts of a number of participants, who are potential and actual co-authors (Duranti, 1997). This is in accordance with dialogical theory, as introduced above.

This concept of participation as a social interaction, introduced by Goffman (1981) has been widely applied to the analysis of intergenerational institutional encounters and is particularly relevant for this thesis as well. Numerous studies of multi-party talk in institutional settings where the child is in focus (health-care, therapy) have shown that the mere presence of children highlights the difference between

participant roles. Children can be cast by adult parties as side- or non-participants rather than as primary addressees (Aronsson, 1991; Aronsson & Cederborg, 1993; Aronsson & Rundström, 1989; Aronsson & Evaldsson, 1993). So-called high control adults (often parents) frequently act as regulators of social distance and seem to determine whether the child is cut off from the ongoing discourse or not (Aronsson, 1991). Even if the status of the child as a full-time participant, a side participant or a non-person, develops in talk between the adults and a child, there is an inherent asymmetry in participation rights between these two groups of interlocutors (Cederborg, 1994).

Further, asymmetry in participation might evolve in encounters where interlocutors entertain different interests and do not have a common understanding of the framing of the event. It might also become pronounced when the body of knowledge relevant for how interlocutors position themselves vis-à-vis each other comes from different sources, which are not necessarily shared and acknowledged by all the primary participants (Linell, 1998).

The asymmetry of power might be additionally aggravated in interpreter-mediated encounters especially when children are involved. Besides, chances of evaluating others' participation status are more restricted in interpreter-mediated encounters than in monolingual talk (Wadensjö, 1992).

#### *4.1.3 Participation and social handicaps*

A child's status in society has often been conceptualized in terms similar to those of a minority group. Membership in such a group, shared for instance by the disabled, old people or a minority ethnic population, is commonly signified by marginalisation, and stigma as well as by the denial of "majority status" rights (Barnes et al, 1999). These characteristics, applicable to many children, might be especially apparent with respect to unaccompanied asylum-seeking children whose marginalization and stigma may be amplified by their belonging to two minority populations: asylum-seekers and children (Bhabha, 2002). Moreover, both child and adult applicants are ascribed a specific kind of diversity linked to a refugee situation which is commonly seen as something that disturbs a natural connection of the individual to the environment of the home country (Blommaert & Verschueren, 1998). It follows from the very fact of separation that children claimants go through in the host country on their own and far removed from their parents, network and familiar cultural

environment of their country of origin. This will often put them automatically in the category of vulnerable victims and objects of welfare concern and support (Montgomery & Foldspang, 2005). In the absence of an adult care-giver, these children are officially defined by authorities as maltreated or in danger of being maltreated, as well as being legally incompetent and thus lacking means to act on their own behalf (Swedish Migration Board, 2001).

In addition, asylum-seeking children can be treated by adults as less skilled interlocutors. Thus, they do not share means of communication and insights with other participants: the repertoire of communicative practices available for the minor is limited by his or her lack of command over the linguistic resources or contextualisation cues salient for the achievement of shared understanding of the event (Gumperz, 1993). Thus, children who lack the relevant knowledge and references about what the asylum hearing is about and what is expected from them, might face difficulties in interpreting the kind of encounter they are involved and participating in.

Thus, pragmatic difficulties faced by the child claimant might make him/her extremely dependent on the adults' knowledge, responsibilities and conversational initiatives, as well as their ability to listen and respect what the child has to say. As a result, adult practitioners, motivated by their concern for these children, might feel less constrained in their normative roles and exceed their mandate as facilitators of the child's rights by "orchestrating" the child's talk, acting as co-authors of the child's narration. These interventions might have consequences for the authenticity of the child's voice and hence far-reaching implications for decision-making and for the participant status of the child. The prevailing image of the child applicant as vulnerable and passive might further contribute to restricting and silencing his/her involvement (Nilsson, 2007). As a consequence, conditions of meaningful participation are not always fulfilled for this group of children, even in settings where matters which primarily concern them are raised and discussed (Bhabha, 2002).

All of these experiences, seen through the lens of the "social model of disability" can be understood as culturally constructed, accomplished in interaction between an asylum - seeking child and his/her social and physical environment (Mehan et al, 1986).

## 4.2 Project

This thesis emanates from a project “How are asylum-seeking children’s accounts of their situation created and understood”, financed by Swedish Council for Working Life and Social Research (DNR 2002-0144) and the Institute of Disability Research, Linköping University and with Ann-Christin Cederborg as the researcher responsible. The project was also approved by the ethical committee of Linköping University (DNR 03-030).

For the purpose of this thesis we contacted the Migration authorities who agreed to assist us in realizing the project. The project intended to shed light on the ways asylum-seeking children describe their life situation and how their stories are created and understood. It was decided to focus our study on Russian-speaking unaccompanied asylum-seeking children as I am proficient in both the Russian and Swedish languages.

The Swedish Migration Board supported the design and the realization of this project. Responsible professionals at the Migration Board were also helpful during the data collecting process.

### 4.2.1 *Main data*

The main data concerns twenty six asylum seeking children. This data was collected in several stages.

As a first step, Ann-Christin Cederborg, who was responsible for the project, made a request in 2003 to the department director of the Migration Board, to copy and analyse tapes, in which authentic asylum hearings with Russian-speaking children were recorded. In addition, a request was made to carry out a study of the children’s files after the assessment of the asylum claims presented by children had been completed. In 2003, both requests were approved by the general director of the Migration Board on condition that a routine confidentiality review was made and that the study followed provisions of the Swedish Confidentiality Act in order to protect the identity of the children and practitioners involved.

The second step involved requests being sent-out by the Migration authorities to all the regional units of the MB to specifically look for audio tapes where Russian speaking unaccompanied asylum seeking children were interviewed. The tapes sent to the project were selected by the caseworkers. We do not know exactly how the

caseworkers selected the cases. The sample is thus selective rather than representative. After an additional confidentiality check, conducted by the lawyers of the respective MB units, the tapes were sent to us at Linköping University. I also visited three MB regional units to procure some of the tapes.

Thirdly, I met and interviewed five caseworkers and one decision-maker in order to obtain information about the children and procedural rules for handling cases of unaccompanied children.

The fourth step was that I analysed the dossier of each participating child. The documentations and interviews in the third and fourth steps were therefore supplementary sources of information.

Audio-tapes from case workers were sent continuously to responsible researchers during the period 2003-2005. Altogether, 81 tapes containing initial interviews, follow-up interviews and recordings made specifically for the purpose of the language analysis were obtained and listened to. Of all the cases sent, two involved languages other than Russian, in three cases, tapes were of inadequate technical quality and in one case; a relative was interviewed about the asylum claims because the child was evaluated as being immature.

In the end, twenty six unaccompanied Russian speaking asylum seeking children who had applied for residence permit in Sweden in 2001-2005 were included in the study. The children (six girls and twenty boys) ranged in age from 14 to 18 years ( $M=16.0$ ). In total this data base involved 59 tapes with recordings of asylum hearings with these children. In one case recordings of both initial and follow-up hearings were used for the analysis. This means that about 61 hours of recorded talk were analysed for the purpose of this thesis.

#### *4.2.2 Definition*

The definition of unaccompanied children applied in this thesis is the same as that laid down in the internal guidelines applied by the MB. It states that under Swedish legislation, any person under the age of eighteen is a minor. All the individuals in our data were registered as children and their applications were dealt with in accordance with the routines laid down for children with no legal guardians in Sweden. The SMB uses the terms “Unaccompanied/separated child” and “Child (minor) with no legal guardian in Sweden” interchangeably. In this thesis, other terms such as separated

children, children applicants, child claimants, youths and adolescents are used to refer to these individuals.

#### *4.2.3 Information obtained from the interviews*

##### Children's origin:

Out of the whole sample of twenty-six children, ten (10) claimed to come from the Russian Federation, four (4) from Kirgizstan, two (2) from Belorussia, three (3) from Kazakhstan, one (1) from Uzbekistan, three (3) from Ukraine, two (2) from Chechnya, and one (1) from Tajikistan. None of the children could produce identification papers, and all but two had been smuggled to Sweden. Seventeen minors claimed they were “voluntary“ migrants, having undertaken the flight on their own initiative. For the remaining nine children the flight was purportedly initiated and organized by relatives or friends of their parents.

##### Family situations

Out of 26 children, six reported living on the streets, four were runaways from institutions, two had lived in a refugee camp, one had lived on his own, ten with relatives, one with his stepfather, and two with strangers.

##### Experiences of traumatic events

All the children disclosed multiple experiences of traumatic events which most commonly included experiences of physical abuse and deprivation, sexual assault (both boys and girls) and rape. Among other life-threatening events mentioned by children were: witnessing war crimes, witnessing the rape and death of their friends or relatives, imprisonment, threat to their lives and threat of persecution (see table 2).

#### 4.2.4 Examples of children's experiences, provided during the asylum hearings

The following excerpts are examples of traumatic experiences disclosed by the children in the sample:

Excerpt 1 (Case Nr.8) Girl, aged sixteen, describes her witnessing rape and death of her friend:

*"[...] Once we were walking through the city we used to go through a little forest when we went from school, we were walking there me and my girlfriend and suddenly five people came out... they had a video camera they took me and held me they raped her and told me to watch... and they cut her throat [...]"*

Excerpt 2 (Case Nr.4) Boy, aged sixteen, describes his home situation which forced him to run away from home and start living on the streets.

*"[...] The woman I lived with she never gave me a mattress to sleep on. I used an old fur coat that was lying on the floor instead. She didn't give a shit about who lived at her place, because there were always a lot of people and drinking parties. She made me clean up after them: dog shit and vomit, and if I refused they beat me up, she or her men. One man tried to rape me, but luckily there was an empty bottle beside me that I could hit him with. When I became older and wiser I ran away because I couldn't and didn't want to stay there because I couldn't stand to live like this, every day... You ask me the names of my parents but I can't tell you, because I have forgotten them... I lived with them for six years and the only thing I remember is how they beat me [...]"*

Excerpt 3. (Case Nr.14) Boy, aged sixteen, describes his experience of living on the streets

*"[...] We came in the morning, made a fire, got some water and warmed it we washed cars and got money [...] a year or so [...] I worked as a handler in the shop, a bakery... My life was bad unbearable I tried to endure I worked mainly in the streets when we did not work we went hungry collected cans. I did not take drugs but my friends did, I did not want... my friends they became drug users, I tried to smoke once and did not like it, quit. My mother drinks a lot, she was fired from her job because she*

*had been drinking... I tried to go to a disco to earn money by starting fights there as I was told to... ...After I said that I can not do it any more they broke my leg... ...If one works in the streets one has to pay the street that one works on... If you don't pay they can take you round the corner and stab you to death... It is very easy to stab a human being, they can do it [...]”.*

In addition, some minors reported the loss of one or both parents who died or were killed, forceful separation from the parents or siblings, or experiences of being abandoned by one or both parents. The same child could have gone through an experience of a double loss of a relative: first being abandoned by his or her mother and secondly, being separated from the father or a sibling.

The loss of a family or a parent (as is the case of many children in this project) could lead to a life of deprivation and neglect. Many of the participating children had lived on the streets for several years or in institutions or a refugee camp. Even those adolescents who lived in families with one parent or relative(s) reported deprivation and neglect: lack of care, money, food and clothes. One minor reported living by himself and financially supporting himself by taking casual jobs.

The usual somatic complaints reported by the children under the waiting period in Sweden included: sleeping and eating disturbances, nightmares, anxiety, headaches, heart aches, and concentration, memory and learning problems. They also had experiences of sickness and stomach ache leading to different degrees of disability. In five cases, impairment of physical and mental functions required medical help or temporary hospitalization.

The children described the dramatic conditions of their flights: lack of sufficient food, inadequate sleeping and bathroom facilities and secrecy and danger around the illegal border crossing. Adolescents described their feelings of relief and safety on arrival in Sweden. Shortly after arrival, these feelings were substituted by anxiety and stress caused by the unfamiliar environment and fear of deportation.

#### *4.2.5 Supplementary data*

As described above, I have collected supplementary data from children's dossiers and interviews with caseworkers. The archive studies of these children's files were mainly performed in the autumn of 2008. Two files were not available at that time so the study of these two cases was conducted in October 2009. Access to archive studies made it possible to compare information about the age, identity and personal history of the child provided during the interview with the data filed in the dossier. Besides, dossiers contained information about the identity of the interviewer, the interpreter and the time of duration of the interview. Information from the dossiers could in general be assessed as correct. Only minor inconsistencies were revealed and corrected in the note under the summary of Study 1 (the age of children in some cases, number of case workers and interpreters and the identity of the caseworkers involved in one case).

Accordingly, the analysis of each child's age, times of arrival, countries of origin, decisions in respective cases and grounds for decisions is based on information found in the children's dossiers at the MB. The dates of birth of the children referred to in this thesis were taken from the first decisions in the respective cases. The analysis of the children's profiles, social situation, health status, traumatic experiences and behaviour is based both on information provided by the children in the asylum hearings and the documented evidence filed in the children's dossiers at the MB (see tables 1 and 2).

This means that I did not just find self-reported experiences of somatic complaints in the asylum hearings. In the dossiers, I also found reports of concerns expressed from the staff of the child units, from guardians, lawyers, psychologists and from social services in Sweden about the health statuses of the children. Guardians and lawyers referred to health –related circumstances when trying to prompt a positive decision on humanitarian grounds or due to particularly distressing circumstances. In one case (23), the condition of the boy was referred to as a life-threatening depression – withdrawal stress reaction (pervasive refusal syndrome).

The children had been described as having a variety of problems, for example: twelve of the children who disclosed experiences of life-threatening events back in their home countries were described in the files as having adjustment problems

or/and as behaving aggressively in Sweden. In three files there were recordings of drug and alcohol abuse, in five files suicidal thoughts and suicidal attempts, and different forms of delinquency were found in ten files. No records of dysfunctional behaviour in Sweden were found in the files of five children, despite self-disclosures of the traumatic experiences they were exposed to in their home countries (see table 2).

The mapping of the final decisions made in the cases of the 26 asylum seeking minors cases showed that in the first round a permanent residence permit was granted to five children and temporary residence permit to one child. Of all the twenty children who received a negative decision in the first round, eleven children launched appeals pleading for the reassessment of the case. Five of them were finally granted permanent residence permits and one a temporary residence permit. For five children, however, the decision remained unchanged.

In nine cases, the final decisions were taken after the new Aliens Act (which replaced previous definition on “humanitarian grounds”) was introduced. That means that in four out of nine cases (cases 8, 11, 15, 23) particularly distressing circumstances were used as a decision-making ground. All of these nine children (except for case 11) had reached the age of majority at the time of the final decision.

In the end, eleven out of the 26 children were finally granted permanent residence permits and one received a temporary residence permit.

The waiting period for those children who received final decision in the first round varied from less than one year to two years. For those children whose cases were assessed in several rounds, one child got a permanent residence permit in the second round (case7), five children in the third round (cases 2, 8, 11, 15, 26) and one in the fourth round (case 23). The waiting periods varied from one to seven years. In the case of one adolescent (case 19), three rounds of decision –making and appeals included a negative decision – a temporary residence permit – and a negative decision, finally followed by forced return. In one case, the adolescent (case 16) who received a negative decision in the first round, soon after arrival, was returned to his home country after five years. During this period, the boy had spent three years on the run under false identity.

#### 4.2.6 The 26 children: summary of background data

**Table 1. Description of the children's arrival, type of interview chosen for the study, first decision, year of decision, final decision, year of decision and grounds for the decision.**

ID Gender/age	Arrival	Type of interview	First Decision	Year of Decision	Final Decision	Year of final Decision	Grounds for the decision
No.1 Girl, aged 15	Smuggled in 2003	Follow-up	Residence permit			2004	Humanitarian (caregiver not found)
No.2 Boy, aged 15	Smuggled in 2001	Follow-up	Negative	2003	Temporary residence permit	2007	Special connection to Sweden/married
No. 3 Boy, aged 17	Smuggled in 2001	Follow-up	Negative	2004	Negative	2004	Not qualified for residence permit
No. 4 Boy, aged 16	Smuggled in 2003	Follow-up	Negative	2004			Not qualified for residence permit
No. 5 Boy, aged 15	Smuggled in 2001	Follow-up	Negative	2002	Negative	2007	Not qualified for residence permit
No. 6 Boy, aged 16	Smuggled in 2002	Follow-up	Negative	2004	Negative	2006	Not qualified for residence permit
No. 7 Boy, aged 16	Smuggled in 2002	Screening	Temporary . residence permit	2003	Residence permit	2004	Humanitarian (Caregivers not found)
No. 8 Girl, aged 15	Smuggled in 2003	Follow-up	Negative	2005	Residence permit	2007	Particularly distressing circumstances
No. 9 Boy, aged 14	Smuggled in 2000	Follow-up	Residence permit	2002			Humanitarian grounds/diagnos e
No. 10 Girl, aged 15	Smuggled in 2003	Screening	Negative	2004			Not qualified for residence permit
No. 11 Boy, aged 14	Smuggled in 2003	Follow-up	Negative	2004	Residence permit	2007	Particularly distressing circumstances
No. 12 Boy, aged 17	Smuggled in 2003	Follow-up	Negative	2004	Negative	2007	Not credible
No. 13 Boy, aged 18	Smuggled in 2004	Follow-up	Negative	2004			Not qualified for residence permit
No. 14 Boy, aged 16	Smuggled in 2002	Follow-up	Negative	2002			Not credible
No. 15 Boy, aged 16	Smuggled in 2001	Follow -up	Negative	2003	Residence permit	2007	Particularly distressing circumstances
No. 16 Boy, aged 17	Smuggled in 2002	Follow-up	Negative	2003			Not qualified for residence permit
No. 17 Boy, aged 17	Smuggled in 2002	Follow-up	Negative	2002			Not credible
No. 18 Girl, aged 17	Smuggled in 2001	Screening Follow-up	Negative	2001			Not qualified for residence permit
No. 19 Boy, aged 16	Smuggled in 2001	Screening	Negative	2001	Negative	2005	Not qualified For residence permit
No. 20 Boy, aged 16	Smuggled in 2002	Follow-up	Residence permit	2003			Humanitarian grounds

No. 21 Girl, aged 17	Arrived in 2002	Follow-up	Negative	2002			Not qualified for residence permit
No. 22 Girl, aged 17	Smuggled in 2005	Follow-up	Negative	2005			Not qualified for residence permit
No. 23 Boy, aged 15	Smuggled in 2001	Follow-up	Negative	2002	Residence permit	2008	Particularly distressing circumstances
No. 24 Boy, aged 17	Smuggled in 2002	Follow-up	Residence permit	2003			Humanitarian grounds
No. 25 Boy, aged 16	Smuggled in 2001	Follow-up	Residence permit	2001			Humanitarian grounds (diagnose)
No. 26 Boy, aged 16	Arrived in 2004	Follow-up	Negative	2005	Residence permit	2007	Special connection to Sweden/married

**Table 2. Description of children's experience of traumatic events in the home country, health and behaviour in Sweden.**

<b>ID Gender/age</b>	<b>Traumatic events, disclosed by the child</b>	<b>Behaviour, filed in the dossier</b>	<b>Health problems, filed in the dossier</b>
Nr. 1 Girl, aged 15	domestic violence, physical abuse, sexual assault	Suicidal	Eating, drinking, sleeping disturbance, withdrawal, depressive
Nr. 2 Boy, aged 15	threat, social deprivation, homelessness	Drug addiction, delinquency, adjustment problems	Sleeping disturbances, anxiety, depressive
Nr. 3 Boy, aged 17	Physical abuse, forced treatment in the mental institution, social deprivation, runaway	Suicidal delinquency	Allergic
Nr. 4 Boy, aged 16	Physical abuse, homelessness, sexual assault, domestic violence	Suicidal attempt	Headaches
Nr. 5 Boy, aged 15	Physical abuse, social, alcohol misuse, drug addiction, deprivation, homelessness	Aggressive behaviour, adjustment problems	Sleeping, eating disturbances, ticks, psychological complaints
Nr. 6 Boy aged 16	Persecuted by authorities, imprisoned, physically abused	Adjustment problems	Somatic complaints
Nr. 7 Boy, aged 16	Physical abuse, imprisonment, neglect, deprivation	Suicidal, aggressive behaviour, delinquency	Eating disturbances, depressive
Nr. 8	Witnessed rape and	Suicidal, aggressive	Sleeping and eating disturbances

Girl, aged 15	death of her friend, raped and sexually abused, forced to prostitution		
Nr. 9 Boy, aged 14	Physical abuse, threat to life, physical injury, social deprivation	Concentration difficulties, delinquency, adjustment problems	Hyper arousal, sleeping disturbance, somatic complaints
Nr. 10 Girl, aged 15	Physical and sexual abuse, attempted rape	Suspected involvement in trafficking	Depressed
Nr. 11 Boy, aged 14	Social deprivation, physical abuse	Concentration difficulties	Headaches, memory and concentration problems
Nr. 12 Boy, aged 17	Homeless, physical abuse, neglect, deprivation, persecuted as a member of ethnic minority	No record	No record
Nr. 13 Boy, aged 18	Death threat, physical abuse	Delinquency, adjustment problems	No record
Nr. 14 Boy, aged 16	Homeless, physical abuse, injured	Delinquency	No record
Nr. 15 Boy, aged 16	Physical abuse, persecuted as a member of religious and ethnic minority	No record	Headaches, sight problems, somatic complaints
Nr. 16 Boy, aged 17	Physical abuse, threat of sexual assault, imprisoned	Delinquency, drug addiction, suspected in prostitution, adjustment problems	Somatic complaints
Nr. 17 Boy, aged 17	Physical abuse	Delinquency, adjustment problems	No record
Nr. 18 Girl, aged 17	Sexual assault, physical abuse, sold for prostitution, neglect, social deprivation	Delinquency	Somatic complaints
Nr. 19 Boy, aged 16	Sexual assault, forced to prostitution, drug dealing, neglect, social deprivation, physical abuse	Delinquency, aggressive behaviour, drug addiction	Problems linked to drug addiction
Nr. 20	Witnessed war		

Boy, aged 16	crimes, risk for persecution	No record	No record
Nr. 21 Girl, aged 17	Fear for persecution	adjustment problems	Sleeping and eating disturbances
Nr. 22 Girl, aged 17	Repeated rape, threat to life, physical abuse	Withdrawal	No record
Nr. 23 Boy, aged 15	Physical abuse, persecuted as a member of religious and ethnic minority, witnessed a friend's death	Apathic	Psychosomatic complaints, Pervasive refusal syndrome (apathy and communicative collapse)
Nr. 24 Boy, aged 17	Witnessed war crime, fear of persecution	No record	
Nr. 25 Boy, aged 16	Physical abuse, neglect, social deprivation	Deviant behaviour, adjustment problems	Psychosomatic complaints (diagnosed)
Nr. 26 Boy, aged 16	Physical abuse, Deprivation, homeless	No record	Sleeping and concentration difficulties

#### 4.2.7 Data processing

##### Transcription procedure

I have personally transcribed all of the 59 tapes chosen for the analysis of this study, including phrases and words in both Russian and Swedish languages. This work was done between the years 2003 and 2007. In addition, I translated Russian wordings in every fifth transcript (case 1, case 6, case 11, case 16, case 21, case 26) into Swedish for the sake of inter-coder reliability tests with Ann-Christin Cederborg, my first supervisor and co-author of studies 1, 2 and 3. The translations were made as literal as possible, intended to be true to the original wording. In addition, both the Swedish and Russian words and expressions in the excerpts presented in the papers were translated into English. Literal translations from Russian into English presented in excerpts in Paper 3 and Paper 4 were also checked by Per Linell, my Russian-speaking second supervisor and co-author in those studies.

According to the transcription conventions adopted in this thesis, talk in the hearings and excerpts presented in the papers (except paper 4) is normalized to

conventional orthography. Variants of pronunciation are not specified. Punctuation symbols are used to mark grammatical boundaries as in conventional writing. Transcription was performed *in extenso*. The transcription conventions that have been used are the following: (.) micro pause, (1.5) a timed pause in seconds and tenths of seconds, (xxx) inaudible words, [ ] overlapping speech, () restart, ((...)) break in communication, → a righthand arrow marking an utterance specifically referred to in the analysis presented in the text, < > words (within the arrows) which are spoken at a slower rate than the surrounding talk, > < talk faster than normal.

Thus, the present transcription is much less fine grained than is normal in the conventions of CA (Conversational Analysis, e.g. Atkinson & Heritage, 1984).

To meet the demands of the dialogue-interpreted conversations, utterances in Swedish and Russian presented in excerpts are provided in close (“literal”) translations into English. Speaker identities are indicated by abbreviations. The translations are given in *italics* under each line. The transcripts are laid out in such a way that whenever a new speaker starts talking (including interrupted onsets), this is indicated by a new line.

### Ethical considerations

Tapes, copies of decisions, coding manuals and coded transcripts (paper copies and digital copies saved on an extra hard disk) were kept in a burglar -proof safe. Personal details and references to places that might permit identification have been removed from the transcripts and excerpts provided in the papers to ensure that none of the participants could be recognized. These changes have no implications for the findings reported. The study has been approved by the Ethical Committee, Linköpings University, Sweden (Dnr. 03-030).

### Method

This is an empirical study of interpreter-mediated asylum hearings with unaccompanied children. In order to do justice to the richness of these discursive data we chose to use both quantitative and qualitative methods of analysis.

In Study 1 we chose a quantitative method to explore details of interpreter-mediated interaction that were of particular interest to the project and for this thesis. We examined the content of utterances produced by caseworkers and the accuracy of the

renditions made by the interpreters. In particular, we categorised and analysed the quality of the caseworkers' questions as well as categorising and analysing the renditions of these questions provided by the interpreter to the child. In study 2, we quantitatively categorised and analysed how the children responded to the questions rendered and how the children's responses were rendered to the caseworkers, guardians and lawyers.

All statistical calculations were performed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) for Windows version 15.0.

A discursive-analytical, qualitative approach was chosen for Study 3 which deals with the interactional dynamics of selected hearings. Such a discourse analysis allows us to show how the participation status of the child is interactively constructed. Study 4 too is discourse-analytic in its character and focuses on interactive aspects of trust and distrust in the highly complex communicative activity type, asylum hearings.

## V Summaries of studies

### 5.1 Study 1

#### **“Mediated Communication with Minors in Asylum seeking hearings”**

Olga Keselman; Ann-Christin Cederborg; Michael. E. Lamb & Örjan Dahlström  
(Published in the Journal of Refugee Studies, 2008).

The aim of the study was to explore the way in which interviewers and interpreters construct asylum relevant questions. This study evaluates caseworkers' information-seeking prompts in interviews with asylum-seeking minors and assesses the accuracy of the interpreters' renditions of these questions.

Twenty six Russian-speaking minors, age ( $M=16.0$ ) were individually interviewed by one of the 12 caseworkers, who were assisted by one of 18 interpreters. A quantitative analysis examined the type of questions asked and the accuracy of the corresponding renditions. To address these issues, we first categorized the caseworkers' utterances when eliciting asylum-relevant information. The questions were coded as 1) open-ended invitations (for the children to report information) 2) directive requests (for

information about what, where and when), 3) option-posing questions 4), suggestive utterances 5) summaries of the information provided by the children 6) clarifications 7) requests for clarification 8) advice giving 9) expressions of social pressure and 10) expressions of social support.

The study shows that interviewers rely heavily on focused questions, which are more likely to elicit inaccurate information. When open questions are asked, the interviewers tend to ask narrow “directive “questions rather than broader “invitations”.

In order to assess the accuracy of the corresponding renditions, we identified and categorized interpreters’ utterances assigning them to the following categories: equivalent renditions and inaccurate renditions. Four types of inaccurate renditions were distinguished 1) modified, 2) expanded, 3) blocked and 4) simplified.

The interpreters’ renditions of utterances were often inaccurate. Almost half of the misrepresentations altered the content and one third involved changes in the type of question asked. This indicates that both interviewers and interpreters clearly need special training to ensure that they serve asylum-seeking minors adequately.

Note: Some inconsistencies in the data were discovered during the archive study. In the abstract, the number of caseworkers and interpreters is not correct in the original paper. Instead of “one of 10 caseworkers assisted by one of 17 interpreters” should be... “one of 12 caseworkers assisted by one of 18 interpreters”. In the sentence on page 3 “the interviewers were 13 caseworkers” should be “the interviewers were 12 caseworkers”. In the sentence on page 3 “One caseworker was involved in seven cases, two in four cases, two in three cases, three in two cases, and five in one case each”, the number of cases per caseworker is not correct and should instead be as follows: “One caseworker was involved in seven cases, two in three cases, four in two cases and five in one case each” I also found that there was an error in the following sentence on page 4: “The asylum-seeking children ranged in age from 13 to 18 years (M=16.1)”. The age range is not correct, and should be as follows: “The asylum-seeking children ranged in age between 14 to 18 years (M=16.0)”. Since these inaccuracies were detected in the last check of the files, they could not be entered into Paper 1 because it had already been published.

## 5.2 Study 2

### **"Asylum seeking minors in interpreter-mediated interviews: what do they say and what happens to their responses?"**

Olga Keselman; Ann-Christin Cederborg; Michael. E. Lamb & Örjan Dahlström  
(accepted for publication *Child & Family Social Work*)

This study explored how asylum-seeking minors report information when formally interviewed. A quantitative analysis examined the translated questions asked by the officials, the minors' responses to them, and the accuracy with which the minors' responses were rendered. The data involved twenty – six Russian-speaking children (M= 16.0 years of age) were individually interviewed by 52 officials (caseworkers, guardians and lawyers) who were assisted by one of eighteen interpreters.

Our primary objective for this study was to explore the extent to which the children's informativeness (in terms of disclosures or non disclosures) could have been affected by the quality of the information-seeking prompts. Our second objective was to examine how the interpreters managed to transmit substantial information provided by the children.

To address these issues, we first categorized the interpreters' utterances when seeking asylum-relevant information. The questions were coded as 1) open-ended invitations (for the children to report information) 2) directive requests (for information about what, where and when), 3) option-posing questions 4), suggestive utterances 5) summaries of the information provided by the children 6) clarifications 7) expressions of social support, or 8) expressions of social pressure. Second, we categorized the quality of the children's responses about substantive (asylum-relevant) issues. These responses were coded as disclosures or non disclosures. Disclosures involved: request conforming responses, extended task-related disclosures, disagreements, or agreements; whereas non-disclosures involved evasive responses or the absence of responses. Finally, renditions of the children's responses were categorized as accurate (close, summarised, expanded), inaccurate (divergent or zero), or non-renditions (monolingual sequences initiated by the interpreter).

The findings show that the asylum-seeking minors distinguish themselves as active participants. They appeared eager to disclose relevant information despite being asked many potentially contaminating questions. Most of the children's responses were accurately rendered but when mistranslations occurred, they might have affected the fact-finding process substantially. This means that minors and officials involved in the asylum-seeking process need to recognize that both the questions asked and the responses given may be influenced by the third parties involved, i.e the interpreters.

### 5.3 Study 3

#### **"That is not necessary for you to know!" - Negotiation of the participant status of minors in interpreter-mediated asylum hearing**

Olga Keselman., Ann-Christin Cederborg & Per Linell

(accepted for publication in *International Journal of Research and Practice in Interpreting*)

This article is a study of how the participation status of asylum-seeking children is interactively constructed in interpreter-mediated asylum hearings. We have undertaken an analysis of 50 non-repair side-sequences from 26 hearings with Russian-speaking, asylum-seeking children in Sweden. A side-sequence is here defined as a monolingual sequence conducted in only one of the languages involved in the interviews. It involves the interpreter and only one of the primary interlocutors.

In this article, four extracts were chosen for a micro-analysis in order to elucidate how interpreters can have an impact on asylum seeking children's participant statuses. We show that the right of the child to make his or her voice heard can be challenged, especially when the interpreters exclude, distort, discredit and guide the voices of the children; something which may be done with the tacit approval of caseworkers.

Our findings indicate that unskilled interpreters should not be hired for interpreting in asylum hearings with unaccompanied asylum-seeking children. Deficient interpreting performed by unskilled interpreters in the stressful, demanding and

challenging environment of the asylum hearing may impact on the authenticity of the child's testimony and deny justice to the child as a speaker of a minority language.

## 5.4 Study 4

### **Trustworthiness at stake: Trust and distrust in investigative interviews with Russian adolescent asylum-seekers in Sweden**

Per Linell & Olga Keselman

(Paper prepared for Marková, I. & Gillespie, A. (Eds.), *Trust and Conflict: Representation, culture and dialogue*. Submitted to series *Cultural dynamics of social representations*. Series editor: J. Valsiner (Routledge)

This paper deals with analyses of the actual interaction in the interpreter-mediated asylum interviews. Our results confirm the view that this communicative activity type exhibits a high level of mutual distrust.

Two sides of trust and distrust have been highlighted here: formal aspects and content aspects. On the formal side, we have pointed to misalignments in interactions as indexes of mutual distrust. We have shown a characteristic sequential organisation of escalating expressions of lack of trust, in terms of so-called mistrust sequences. As far as content is concerned, we have pointed to the importance assigned by participants to discrepancies and inconsistencies in the other's discourse. Formal and pragmatic conditions contribute to situations in which trust and distrust are explicitly topicalised in discourse. At the same time, our dialogical account, (which includes both interactional and contextual aspects) especially the analysis of the framing of the communicative activity type involved, shows that the interactional processes that generate trust, distrust, lack of trustworthiness and social handicaps, are interdependent with premises of the situation type.

## VI Concluding discussion

The overall aim of the thesis is to explore how the participation of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children is interactively constructed in interpreter-mediated asylum

hearings. Participation is analysed in a setting where the children are expected to deliver information that can be used for the assessment and decision-making in their cases.

## 6.1 Participation in interaction in the asylum hearings

The findings from the studies conducted in this thesis have highlighted some of the constraints which appear in the complex context of asylum hearings and that prevent children from stating their cases.

We have shown how certain practices identified in asylum interviews, such as the insufficient interrogating techniques used by the practitioners, unskilled interpretation of both questions and answers, interventions initiated by the interpreters, as well as lack of trust, contribute to restricted participation on the part of these children (Studies 1, 2, 3, 4).

Our analysis has shown that caseworkers extensively relied on option posing but also on suggestive prompts, when hearing asylum seeking children about their situation and asylum claims. These prompts were previously found to negatively affect the accuracy and the scope of the information elicited. Unfortunately, we also found that the number of invitations was low, which may have inhibited the minors' opportunities to give free-recall accounts of their experiences. The extensive use of directive questions may, however, have given the minors' opportunities to recall information that was more likely to be accurate.

Other barriers restricting the participation of these children may be related to a lack of professional skills on the part of both the practitioners involved and interpreters. We found, for example, that few interviewers were trained and skilled in child-sensitive interviewing which is conducive to the needs, rights and situation of the asylum seeking children (Study 1 and 2). We found that the interpreter's qualifications, communicative skills and conversational strategies had direct consequences for the quality and outcome of the hearing (Studies 1, 2, 3, 4).

Due to the interview conditions, interpreters were responsible for how the whole flow of information was rendered, what messages were conveyed to children and how. We found that the involvement of the interpreters had a bearing on the degree to which the format and content of the questions posed by the interviewers was maintained in renditions. While the majority of the questions were rendered correctly, there were

cases when both the format and the content were changed. This circumstance could further deteriorate the quality of the questioning procedure (Study 1).

Our analysis of the children's responsive strategies (Study 2) has shown that despite their traumatisation and vulnerability, these Russian-speaking applicants tried hard to make their voices heard. Overall, they recognized their obligation to be cooperative and report facts, but there was some tension between their willingness to disclose and to withhold particular kinds of information.

Children were particularly selective and circumventing especially when asked about details which could facilitate an estimation of their age, assessment of their origin, the identity of smugglers or the whereabouts of caregivers. Children seemed to be aware of the fact that vague and imprecise responses could be taken as signs of dishonesty and tried to compensate this negative impression by offering elaborations including facts not asked for. Overall, elaborated answers could have been applied as a common response strategy irrespective of the type of the questions asked by the interviewer (disregarding invitations). In other words, asylum-seeking children could try to squeeze in what they had to say beyond the limitations imposed by the format of the hearing.

Another finding was that despite their efforts, information provided by children was occasionally lost or altered in the process of translation because interpreters modified both the style and content of the children's responses (Study 2). In study 3 we also identified other strategies used by the interpreters to influence the content of the children's responses. For example, the interpreters' editing and coordinating work was initiated in side-sequence talk directed to children in Russian. During these sequences some interpreters not only forced the children to respond but also tried to steer their responses in accordance with their own understanding of institutional demands of consistency and logics. This means that versions of the children's responses that were rendered might have contained details and accounts that were interpreter-influenced rather than self-disclosed by the children (Studies 2, 3). As a result of the interpreter's editing work, the authenticity of the children's voice, as well as important evidence bearing testimony to possible handicaps, social history and traumatisation, might have been lost (Study 2).

In addition we found that during side-sequences, interpreters could exclude the child as a participant and discredit him/her as an informer. We even noticed that when children who had some knowledge of the Swedish language did monitor the accuracy of translation and tried to question and bring to light potentially disadvantaging moves, their efforts could have been effectively counteracted by the interpreters (Study 3).

Caseworkers could have been able to detect incidents of side-sequences between interpreters and children, but they refrained from stopping or commenting on them. This might have been for several reasons: 1) because caseworkers lacked the means to understand what this talk was about and had no choice but to trust the interpreters as responsible and professional individuals, 2) Caseworkers might have shared an understanding with the interpreters that children are pragmatically impaired interlocutors whose contributions are in need of editing, and 3) caseworkers might have felt less constrained when controlling encounters where children asylum seekers are involved (Study 3).

Overall, our findings indicate that interpreters are influential participants in charge of the speaker's opportunities to make his/her voice heard. As such, their professional skills and behaviour can have consequences for the legal security and fairness of the asylum determination procedure.

## 6.2 The asylum seeking children as being and becoming socially handicapped

Asylum seeking children are generally recognized as constituting a vulnerable group. This definition refers to the ways in which these children are marginalized, socially excluded, have limited opportunities, suffer abuse, hardships, prejudice and discrimination (Larkin, 2009: 146).

Our studies have shown that the Russian-speaking asylum-seeking children involved in this study were indeed a highly traumatized and vulnerable group. Many of them have reported multiple psychosomatic symptoms, which in several cases were accompanied by concentration difficulties and memory problems. These health and trauma-related conditions may have limited their functioning as individuals, but most of them really tried hard to cope with their role as participants and informers.

Despite their efforts to make themselves heard, these children were not always respected and encouraged when trying to pursue these roles.

### 6.3 Asylum hearing as a communicative activity type

As a communicative activity type, an asylum hearing is a very complex asymmetrical social encounter with multiple, and at times controversial, goals and demands. For these reasons, the dynamics of asylum hearings can be hard to manage, not only for the children described above, but for the other parties (caseworkers and interpreters) as well. Explanations behind trouble-sources and shortcomings which might appear in this encounter are many-sided and can not be solely ascribed to lack of proficiency or lack of commitment to the institutional goals and approaches.

Practitioners in charge of the hearing can, for example, be confronted with communicative dilemmas which can not be resolved in a simple or straightforward way. First, asylum seeking children, with their tragic life-stories and experiences, mentality, delinquency and conduct problems, do not match the usual categories of indigenous child clients who come into contact with Swedish authorities. It may be hard to stay ambivalent towards these children and treat them impartially. Practitioners may feel inclined to keep close contact with them by taking care of their needs and solve their problems.

Second, it is not uncomplicated to listen to these children, critically assess their stories and fit them into the generally defined grounds outlined by the asylum law, regulations and MB policy documents. It can also be hard to fulfil the task of performing an individual assessment of the children's needs and the eventual harm that repatriation might inflict on their psycho-social development. At times, this assessment might imply decisions and choices primarily oriented towards economic and political interests of the state, which eventually clash with the views and opinions of the asylum seeking child but perhaps also with the opinions of the caseworkers.

Third, it is not easy to communicate through interpreters, to treat them as if they do not exist, and at the same time be dependent on them, and aware of their presence and involvement.

Fourth, interpreters might have problems handling child clients who share the same origin as they do. They might find it difficult to understand and to adhere to

the agendas of the hearing, stay neutral, balance their own roles and cope with the vicarious traumatising and stress inherent in this kind of situation.

All in all, these various complicating factors are to be taken into account when explaining why mutual and common understanding is hard to accomplish in this type of setting. They are also relevant for understanding why barriers restricting the participation of the unaccompanied asylum seeking children might evolve and persist in this type of encounter.

## 6.4 Practical implications

Our intention with the project and studies was not to point out specific individuals, bring to light their shortcomings or scrutinize their professional performance. Instead, our point of departure is to further understand the asylum hearing as a specific type of encounter and to shed light upon its complexity and the communicative dilemmas that might inflict on the child's right to make her/ himself heard. Our findings have highlighted factors that contribute to restricting participation, some of which might be improved. It was found, for example, that unskilled interpreters should not be hired for interpreting in asylum hearings. In addition, the best way to improve the quality of the interviewing is to realize that adult participants (caseworkers and interpreters) are to be seen as a team. That means that both caseworkers and interpreters might benefit from special training in the characteristics of desirable interview techniques. Moreover, the best possible collaboration might be based on a joint understanding of the specificity and interactional complexity of the setting and goals of the interview. These insights might be developed, for example, from training based on the discursive analysis of excerpts from authentic asylum hearings of the type presented in this thesis.

## VII Suggestions for future research

The present thesis is an attempt to explore how participation of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children is interactively constructed in interpreter-mediated asylum hearings. The main focus is on the conditions of the interview and their impact on the right of the children to participate. The main attention has been attached to the role of adult practitioners (interviewers and interpreters) and to the

premises of the context where interaction takes place. The findings of this thesis underscore the need for future research where issues of participation can further be studied and thus from the perspective of asylum-seeking children. Interviewing them about their personal understanding of what constitutes meaningful participation would provide insights relevant for the improvement of practices and policies. Analysis of the decisions made in each case could further inform about how the children's voices and perspectives were taken into account by the Migration authority.

## VIII Sammanfattning på svenska

Avhandlingens övergripande syfte var att belysa olika aspekter av kommunikativ delaktighet i tolkmedierade utredningsintervjuer med ensamkommande rysktalande ungdomar som sökte asyl i Sverige mellan 2001-2005. Delaktigheten i asylprocessen garanteras till dessa barn via både svensk administrativ lag och Barnkonventionen som är införlivade i Utlänningslagen. Migrationsverket har integrerat principer om barnets bästa och beaktandet av barnets åsikter i sitt arbete med asylsökande minderåriga.

I denna avhandling har vi tittat på delaktighetens villkor i en komplicerad, hybrid kommunikativ verksamhet där krav som ställs på deltagare är motstridiga. Hybriditeten kan härledas till de kommunikativa dilleman som är svåra att lösa och hantera för alla inblandade partner: handläggaren, barnet och tolken. Handläggare förväntas styra samtalen där det kommunikativa utbytet är översatt av tolkar som kan påverka hur samtalen går till. Motstridigheten ligger i att handläggare förväntas behandla alla lika och individualisera, ta hänsyn till lagars utgångspunkter och samtidigt beakta det enskilda barnets intressen och behov. Det kan vara svårt att hålla sig neutral och bemöta de minderåriga klienterna vars erfarenheter, upplevelser, beteende och behov skiljer sig från vad som i vanliga fall tillskrivs barn.

De asylsökande barnen kommer till Sverige för att få stanna här. Resultaten visar att de är aktiva aktörer i försöket att påverka ett positivt beslut i deras ärenden. Barnens berättelse utgör en viktig källa för det underlag som ligger till grund för beslutsfattandet. De kommunikativa uppgifter som åläggs barn kan vara svåra att genomföra. Det kan härledas till deras levnadsvillkor, utsatthet, psykosomatiska problem, minnes- och koncentrationssvårigheter. Ytterligare begränsningar uppstår på

grund av deras pragmatiska och språkliga svårigheter. Ungdomarna kan också ha svårigheter att orientera sig i en kontext där de varken behärskar språket eller samtalets regler och normer.

Trots dessa hinder, verkar det som att barnen försöker tackla sin roll som asylsökande och informanter på ett aktivt och strategiskt vis. Ett sätt att påverka utfrågningen var att avgöra vilken information som skulle avslöjas, undanhållas eller läggas till. De undvek till exempel att svara på de frågor som kunde avslöja deras ålder, ursprung eller anhörigas hemvist, d.v.s. den information som skulle möjliggöra fastställandet av deras identitet och avvisning/utvisning. Däremot, bidrog dem med extra upplysningar som de inte tillfrågades om.

Våra studier har visat att ungdomarna kunde hindras av både handläggare och tolkar att fritt lägga fram sina åsikter på sitt eget sätt. Tolkarnas insats var avgörande för vilken information som kom fram till handläggare, exempelvis, hade dem vid vissa tillfällen ändrat på både språket och formatet i barnens svar. En del kommunikativa strategier som initierades av tolkar kunde hänföras till både deras professionella färdigheter och situationens hybriditet och komplexitet. Tolkarna kunde uppvisa svårigheter att hålla sig neutrala till de asylsökande barnen men också hantera situationen där de inte alltid verkade veta vilka regler som gällde. Ålderskillnaden mellan barnen och de vuxna deltagarna kunde också ha inverkat på hur barnen blev bemötta och hur man respekterade deras röster. Vi har exempelvis identifierat sekvenser där tolkarna genom sina enspråkiga kommunikativa initiativ aktivt försökte exkludera och diskreditera barnens röster, något som genomfördes med handläggarens passiva medgivande.

De kommunikativa premisser som uppstår i asylsamtal påverkar barnens deltagarstatus och deras möjligheter att berätta om sina asylskäl.

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It is really hard to believe that this thesis is finally written and published. I have to admit that I hardly picked the subject it was more like the subject picked me. I feel quite privileged to have gotten access to such an extraordinary, interesting material and to have analysed a little part of it. This work was made possible due to the initiatives and efforts of many people who assisted me in turning this project into reality.

First and foremost, I want to thank my supervisors, Ann-Christin Cederborg and Per Linell for their support, patience and knowledge that they generously shared with me. In interaction with them I finally started to get a grasp about how to write, rewrite, submit and resubmit, think “scientifically”, “kill my darlings”, take criticisms and listen. There is still a long way to go.

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